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Three-option proposal inserted into wide-ranging passenger protections package.

ALBANY, Ga. — The next time you are aboard a commercial aircraft and are handed a complimentary pack of peanuts, enjoy chomping on them; It might be the last pack you eat on a flight.

The United States Department of Transportation last week proposed new wide-ranging consumer protections for air travelers.

The new rules would increase compensation for customers involuntarily bumped from flights and allow passengers to make and cancel reservations within 24 hours without penalty, among others.

Tucked among the 13 proposals is protection for passengers with peanut allergies. The proposal offers three options:

- Banning the serving of peanuts and all peanut products by both U.S. and foreign carriers on flights covered by DOT's disability rule.

- Banning the serving of peanuts and all peanut products on all such flights where a passenger with a peanut allergy is on board and has requested a peanut-free flight in advance.

- Requiring a peanut-free buffer zone in the immediate area of a passenger with a medically-documented severe allergy to peanuts if passenger has requested a peanut-free flight in advance.

The proposal brought a sharp response from U.S. Rep. Sanford Bishop, D-Albany.

“I am shocked and concerned about the excessive regulations proposed by the Department of Transportation regarding peanuts on airplanes,” Bishop said in a press release. “Given Congress’ response in the past, I am surprised that the Department of Transportation is trying this again.

“I represent one of the largest peanut producing regions in the country, and I look forward to working with my colleagues to end another example of extreme government regulation, and I am hopeful that we will prevail.”

Raffella Marie Fenn, president and managing director of the National Peanut Board, said a ban on peanuts is not the answer.

“America’s peanut farmers have invested more than \$7 million in food allergy education and research through the National Peanut Board,” She said. “We know from all of our work that banning foods does not protect the food allergic. It causes a false sense of security. The key is preparation and education.

“More importantly, it is unethical to single out peanuts when studies show that more people are allergic to milk, eggs, fish and shell fish. And, will the airlines remove all nuts? Because people are also allergic to tree nuts, wheat, soy; so, where does it end?”

